



CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Q: What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

A: CWD is a neurological disease affecting primarily deer, moose and elk. It is caused by an abnormal protein, called a prion, that attacks the brains of infected animals, causing them to lose weight, display abnormal behavior and lose bodily functions. It is always fatal.

Q: What are the signs of CWD in deer?

A: CWD attacks the brains of infected deer causing the animals to become emaciated, display abnormal behavior, lose bodily functions and die. Signs identified in captive cervids (deer, elk) include excessive salivation, loss of appetite, progressive weight loss, excessive thirst and urination, listlessness, teeth grinding, holding the head in a lowered position, and drooping ears. CWD is a slowly progressive disease; signs are usually not seen until the animal is 18 months of age or older.

Q: How is CWD transmitted?

A: The mode of transmission between deer is not completely understood. However, it is thought the disease is transmitted from direct contact between animals in a herd. Environmental factors, heat or disinfection do not easily kill the disease-causing prion, so transmission from a contaminated environment may also be possible.

Q: How is CWD diagnosed?

A: Lymph nodes and brain samples are collected from hunter-harvested or dead deer and sent to nationally certified labs where they are examined microscopically using special stains to identify the CWD prion.

Q: Is there going to be another sample collection effort Allamakee County like last year?

A: That will likely be discussed with the local landowners and citizens during the public meeting.

Q: Are we just wasting our time?

A: While it is certainly discouraging that CWD continues to spread in Wisconsin, other states such as Illinois have taken actions that appear to at least slow the rate of spread of CWD. In Minnesota and New York no new cases of CWD have been reported after the initial surveillance. In Missouri the extra surveillance is being used to focus efforts where removal of deer could be most effective.

Q: What happens if we do nothing?

A: Left unchecked all indications are that the prevalence of CWD in Iowa's deer herd would continue to increase and the area impacted would expand. At this time it does not appear whitetails are genetically resistant to CWD. If this is true, at some time in the future deer numbers will begin to decline as survival rates of adult deer decrease.

Q: Is CWD just now being detected because we are doing more testing? Hasn't it always been present?

A: Although the amount of testing in Iowa did significantly increase following the finding of CWD in 2002 in Wisconsin, no positive animals were found until 2013. The CWD-positive deer were found in Allamakee County, where deer from Wisconsin could easily move. The deer that tested positive in 2013 was tested genetically by Iowa State University and while it is impossible to say for certain where it originated, microsatellite data indicate the deer is somewhat more likely of Wisconsin origin. Nearly 60,000 samples have been collected and only recently did any test positive. These results and the results from surrounding states do not support the argument that CWD has always been present on Iowa's landscape.

Q: What are the recommendations for hunters looking to minimize their exposure to CWD?

A: According to the Center for Disease Control, hunters should consult with their state wildlife agencies to identify areas where CWD occurs and take appropriate precautions when hunting in such areas; avoid eating meat from deer and elk that look sick or that test positive for CWD, consider having the deer or elk tested for CWD before consuming the meat if the animal was harvested from an area known to have CWD-positive animals. Information about testing is available from most state wildlife agencies. Lastly, wear gloves, bone-out the meat from the animal, and minimize handling of the brain and spinal cord tissues when field dressing an animal.

Q: Is it safe to eat venison from Iowa deer?

A: According to the Center for Disease Control, no strong evidence of CWD transmission to humans has been reported. The prion that causes CWD accumulates only in certain parts of infected animals – the brain, eyes, spinal cord, lymph nodes, tonsils and spleen.

Health officials, however, advise that no part of any animal known to be infected with CWD should be consumed by humans or other animals. In addition, they suggest that hunters take simple precautions when field dressing deer in areas where CWD is found:

- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed.
- Avoid consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes of harvested animals. (Normal field dressing coupled with boning out of a carcass will remove essentially all of these parts.)
- Request that your animal be processed individually, without meat from other animals being added to meat from your animal.

Q: Is CWD transmissible to humans?

A: A World Health Organization panel of experts reviewed all available information on CWD and concluded that at this time there is no scientific evidence that CWD can infect humans.

CWD belongs to the family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). Other TSEs include: Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease in humans; bovine spongiform encephalopathy (“Mad Cow Disease”) in cattle; and scrapie in sheep and goats.

The World Health Organization advises that no tissue that is likely to contain the bovine spongiform encephalopathy agent, nor the part or product of any animal which has shown signs of a TSE should enter the human or animal food chain.

Q: Is CWD a risk for Iowa’s livestock?

A: There is no evidence that CWD can be transmitted under natural conditions to cattle. However, the disease has been experimentally reproduced in cattle by direct injection of the infectious agent into their brains.